

Mercer Museum
Doylestown
Bucks County
Pennsylvania

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Philadelphia District

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office

Additional
Mercer Museum (Bucks County
Historical Society)
Pine and Ashland Streets
Doylestown
Bucks County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1007

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MERCER MUSEUM
(Bucks County Historical Society)

HABS No. PA-1007

Location: Pine and Ashland Streets, Doylestown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner and Occupant: Bucks County Historical Society.

Present Use: Used as a museum, which displays the Henry Chapman Mercer collection of early American tools and machines.

Significance: A pioneering example of the use of reinforced concrete. An eclectic interpretation of Medieval styles, the building was designed for the Bucks County Historical Society by antiquarian and inventor, Henry Chapman Mercer (1856-1930). The building houses Mercer's huge collection of pre-industrial tools, machines and implements.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: April 1913 to August 1916.
2. Architect: Henry Chapman Mercer.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Mercer purchased the property in 1900 and 1903. In fulfillment of the terms of his will, the building passed upon his death to the Bucks County Historical Society.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The building supervisor was William Labs. Suppliers included: Vulcanite Cement Company; Buffalo Steel Company; New Jersey Wire Cloth Company; Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company and others. For a full listing of contractors and suppliers, see "Mercer Museum - Accounts for Building," April 1, 1913 to September 19, 1916, in the Bucks County Historical Society Collection.
5. Original plans and construction: In Mercer's "Notebook for the first Plans of New Museum for the Historical Society of Bucks County" (in possession of Trustees of Fonthill), there are specifications, rough sketches, construction details and descriptions of the progress of the work.
6. Alterations and additions: The main building is connected to the original Bucks County Historical Society building, a brick

Georgian Revival structure designed by Horace Trumbauer in 1904. Later additions to the main building include: the concrete library wing designed by A. Oscar Martin & Son in 1933-36; the concrete entrance wing and stair tower designed by Shappell and Crothers in 1974.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Irregular in massing, the building is an eclectic interpretation of Medieval design motifs. Both interior and exterior are highly personal statements by the designer and combine to form a unique exhibit area with interesting spatial and lighting design.
2. Condition of fabric: In generally good condition except for upper portions of chimneys, where combination of brick structure with cement plaster covering has proven unsatisfactory.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Four-and-a-half stories with six-and-a-half story north tower and seven-and-a-half story south tower, all on raised basement. A generally rectangular form, eight bays (59') by eleven bays (82') with a 16' x 16' bay window at the southeast corner and a rectangular extension at the southwest corner extending approximately 12' deep and 22' long.
2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete.
3. Wall construction: Reinforced concrete. There is a rectangular datemark reading "HCM..1915" with a hand print.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: A balcony (approximately 35' by 6') on the west facade first gallery level with pierced concrete balustrade.
5. Chimneys: Approximately 18 brick chimneys with cement plaster facing and pyramidal concrete tops.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Wooden panelled double doors on east facade at ground floor level, with tile crest in flat arch above.

Wooden vertical door at the northwest corner giving access to basement.

- b. Windows and shutters: Fenestration very irregular. Multi-paned windows of various sizes with flat arches, round arches, or triangular arches. Concrete muntins and mullions.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hipped roof of concrete with brushed cement plaster finish.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Concrete moulded with double fillet above, ovolo, and double fillet below.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Concrete dormers, generally gabled; concrete north and south towers.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Along the west side of the building are a series of groin-vaulted rooms. The furnace room is located at the southwest corner. Along the north and east sides of the building there is a barrell-vaulted pipe tunnel, 6' x 5'.
- b. Central display area: In the center of the building is an open court (6 bays by 3 bays) which extends the height of the building. Encircling this court are three arcaded galleries (1 bay wide).
- c. Ground floor and first through third gallery levels: Surrounding the open court on all sides are display rooms.
- d. North tower: The lower level is a display area. The upper level contains four display areas. Connecting the north and south towers is a passageway on the east side of the building.
- e. South tower: The western portion of the tower includes a two-story display room with a narrow interior balcony on three sides. Above are three other display rooms. A narrow east-west passageway leads to the eastern portion of the tower in which there is another display area.

2. Stairways: Numerous stairways of various lengths connecting

the different levels and areas of the building. Concrete with iron pipe railing handrails; 3/4" finish coat of cement plaster as tread surface.

3. Flooring: Concrete smooth finish coat.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Exposed concrete walls and ceilings with rough finish showing form materials (burlap, wood, tin, etc.)
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Dutch doors of steel boiler plate on the lower half and 3/2 lights on the upper half. Steel sashes with concrete surround.
6. Decorative features and trim: Decorative tiles from the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works decorate the two-story library and south tower stove plate room.
7. Hardware: Door hardware consist of museum pieces (catalogued by BCHS) of various origins, primarily from Bucks County, Pennsylvania.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Original pipeless heater to main floor outlets now replaced by minimal small tube radiators and hot water heat in offices and libraries. A series of small round vent holes in floor and ceiling of each display room was designed in original structure to decrease possible mildew.
 - b. Lighting: Natural lighting is emphasized throughout with minimal electrical service.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building is located on a 7.072 acre site several blocks southeast of the center of Doylestown. The structure runs parallel to Pine Street which runs northwest to southeast.
2. Historic landscape design: A concrete fence approximately four-feet high, made up of a series of connected semicircles, borders Ashland Ave. at the northwest corner of the property. At the northwest corner there is also a large concrete sign with "Bucks County Historical Society" in glazed colored tiles.

There is a split rail and concrete post fence at the southeast border of the lot along Ashland Ave.

3. Outbuildings; The John Byerly log cabin, reportedly the "oldest building" in Doylestown, transported and restored on the Bucks County Historical Society grounds in 1911, occupies the southeast corner of the property.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early views: Several in the collection of the Bucks County Historical Society.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

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2. Secondary and published sources:

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MERCER MUSEUM
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HABS No. PA-1007 (Page 6)

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